An Essay

on

Physical Education.

Respectfully submitted to the Faculty

of

The Homœopathic Medical College

of

Pennsylvania.

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by

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Mich.

The more we contemplate man, the more we see and feel the truth that he is a Microcosm indeed; a miniature world, — an abstract of creation, — an epitome of the universe, — a finite representation of the Infinite Deity! Well saith the heathen motto "Know Thyself!" and the part — "The proper study of mankind is Man." And it may truly be said, that there is nothing in the Mineral, Vegetable and Animal Kingdoms, that cannot be found, essentially, in the human body; and nothing in the world of Mind, that is not shadowed forth in his spiritual nature.

A human being is made up of body and soul. Each is subject to laws adapted to its nature, and therefore needs an interpreter.

So, in great emergences Nature makes ample provision. She has sent forth two classes of men professional in character, ostensibly

consecrated to certain duties, and fitted to perform them (we could wish to say) wisely and well.

Man is Nature's greatest earthly creation. She fashioned him after a divine model, and wrapped him in beauty and glory as in a garment. His brow wears proofs of her labor. Her care for him has always been that of a mother full of solicitude and kindly effort.

For his body there is the Doctor, for his soul, there is the Clergyman. She greets them to do their duty, and that between them he will escape ills that otherwise will work his ruin. And most happy would it be for mankind, were the teachings of these two classes always in harmony with truth.

The clergy are not sparing in their denunciations of the Medical Profession, characterizing them as skeptics in general.

Which, we are sorry to say, is too true; but where shall we search for its cause? Surely, physicians are not worse men than their fellows.

We think we might solve this problem; but it is not our purpose, only so far as may elucidate our subject. It has ever been a favorite doctrine with theologians, that, had our first parents never transgressed, we, their descendants, had never been compelled to labor; and by the sweat of the brow to earn our bread; but had ever lived in perpetual paradise on the earth; and that this work-day world of ours had been one universal Garden of Eden!—

While the physiologist beholds in man, as he contemplates the conformation of his body, and its infinite variety of texture, and their wonderful combinations, a beauty and harmony of arrangement, worthy of his divine

origin.— But he also finds that for the highest development of man's faculties: those which most nearly assimilate him to his creator; that physical exertion, that labor, is most imperitively demanded. And most terrible are the results of disobedience.— But mankind in general, not appreciating the justice, of suffering for the sins of Mother Eve; in a worldly view at least, and being prone to habits of indolence, are ever disposed to accept as truth, the erroneous doctrines of their spiritual teachers; so far at least, as shall assimilate them to their ideas of the Adamic state, by discarding all labor; and living as far as possible, a life of luxury and idleness. And christian men, accept the dogma of the church; and reject the "Heaven born truth" written in characters of living light, in every fibre of man's constitution!

And here we would ask in all humility, that our clerical brethren suspend their censure, of the medical profession, till such time as their own teachings shall accord with the spirit, as well as the letter of the Divine word.—

And to our medical brethren, we would say, reject not the light of Revelation, because the dogmas of the church, do not harmonize with the facts of science; but accept it's "heaven born truths," as the greatest boon ever given, by God, to man.—

All must admit that these erroneous views of labor, are most disastrous to man's well being. Thousands fill an untimely grave, in the season of youth and beauty; while other thousands, aye! millions, live but to prolong a miserable existence; and to entail their own, or worse diseases, upon their offspring;

who in their turn, are only fitted to fill up cemeteries.
that is about as miserable use of humanity, as
we can well name. And verily, we believe,
that much of this evil, may be traced to
this great error of the church. God sees, we
must regard it. And true. There is no truth,
more apparent in nature, or revelation, than
that, written in man's very constitution;
that labor is the law of his life.
And the Divine Word unfolds the truth, that
in the very morning of creation,—when man
sprang forth pure from the hand of God,
that he was commanded to be fruitful, and
multiply, and replenish the earth, and
subdue it. And dominion was given him
over all things therein: and all things, fit
were given for food. And how shall all
this be accomplished without labor?

Shall God create a world; and man not labor therein? — Perish the thought! It is debasing to human nature; and dishonoring to God. And if it be true, that physical exertion is requisite to man's well being; it follows, that a proper physical education, is also essential, to enable him to rightly fulfill the high duties of life, which shall devolve upon him. As students of history, we may find much worthy of imitation, even among heathen nations, and they afford lessons of wisdom, in their method of teaching children and youth; to which ours, even in the nineteenth Century, is but too often sadly, and even criminally, deficient. For this very hour, in the city of Philadelphia, thousands of human beings, with their little frames, are pinched, confined, and confined, on the hard benches of a hot schoolroom;

no less they are but laying the foundation of disease, and premature death. And our bills of mortality of children and youth, exhibit facts which we cannot contemplate without a shudder.—
But let us go back a few thousand years, to ancient Greece, in the days of Sophocles; and see if we cannot learn wisdom.—
The elementary branches of education were acquired among the Athenians, as among ourselves, sometimes by private instruction, but more generally by public schools; many of which, at one period attained a very high degree of reputation, and were crowded with youth from other Grecian states, and even foreign countries. For the first four or six years, however, not the smallest effort was made to improve the mind; the whole of this period of time being devoted,

agreeably to the advice of Plato, and men of many earlier ages, to sports and pastimes, for the purpose of giving strength to the body; exercises which were even afterward continued with the greatest punctuality, under particular regulations, and constituted a very important branch of Athenian education.

In this respect they seem to have imitated the example of the Persians, who never commenced training their children till they were five or six years old, not even those of royal birth. At this age, the rising generation of Persia were placed under the care of their magi, or men of letters, and combined a course of gymnastics with a course of moral science: the former consisted in learning to ride, to shoot with the bow, and fight on horseback: the latter embraced and inculcated the valuable

habits of honesty, and speaking the truth, patience, sobriety, reverence to parents, and the practice of every other virtue. With them literature was subservient to morals. Next to critical initiation into their native language under the most celebrated grammarians, the chief object of Athenian education was, as has been stated, to strengthen the body, and give pliancy to the muscles by athletic exercises; for which purpose three magnificent establishments were instituted at the public expense, consisting of an extensive range of buildings surrounding gardens that were defended by groves, porticoes, and shady walks, from the mid-day sun, and still further embellished by streets of limpid water. These schools were called gymnasia, and comprised

the Lyceum, the Gymnasium and the Academy. Here the Athenian youth were instructed in the art of wrestling, leaping, boxing, tennis, and footracing. The Romans also encouraged their youth to exercise in Gymnasiums, as the surest method of forming a nation of strong and brave soldiers; and during the middle ages, when warlike operations were going on throughout the continent of Europe, when physical energy and activity were of the highest value on the field of battle, manly sports were engaged in with intense ardor by all classes of people, as the principal means of bestowing health and strength. And in England, exercises in the open air were regarded as of such consequence

in the formation of manliness of person and character, that Royal proclamations and parliamentary acts were repeatedly promulgated for their promotion and regulation.

Regular and sufficient exercise is as necessary to health and even life, as air, water, & food.

Every organ of the body has its own appropriate function; and the performance of this function is necessary to its well being. In other words, we are so constituted that every organ must be duely exercised in accordance with the design of its nature, in order to preserve it in health and vigor. If this be neglected for any length of time, disease is the inevitable consequence. Now the muscles are among the largest and most important organs in the body; and consequently if they are suffered by inaction to become enfeebled and diseased, the evil is

correspondingly great. Not only so, but the continued inaction of the muscles, implies the nonperformance of many other important functions, and consequently accummulates evil upon evil. Unless the muscular system is regularly and vigorously exercised, the lungs will not properly act, and hence the function of respiration will be imperfectly performed. This will vitiate the blood, and through it the whole body; corruption and disease will be introduced into every member. Again; unless the muscles are properly exercised, the alimentary organs—the stomach, &c. will not act vigorously, and therefor digestion and assimilation will be imperfectly performed. Of course the body will be imperfectly nourished, and even built up with

crude and injurious products of imperfect digestion. What but evil can result from this? Once more; vigorous and regular muscular action is necessary to the proper performance of the functions of the organs of excretion. Without it the lungs, skin, kidneys, bowels, etc., will not properly perform their office of removing effete and waste matter from the body. The consequence will be that it will accumulate in the system, and obstruct, oppress, irritate and disease the whole vital economy.

Finally, the blood vessels are so constructed and situated with reference to the muscles, that the action of the latter is necessary to assist the proper flow of the blood along the veins and arteries. Without it, the circulation of the blood would be sluggish,

and at last become almost entirely suspended.

Thus we see that regular and vigorous exercise of the muscles, is not only necessary in order to keep these important organs in health, but that it is absolutely necessary to the due performance of the functions of all the organs of the body. Respiration, digestion, nutrition, secretion, excretion, circulation of the blood, and even the phenomena of mentality, can none of them be properly performed for any length of time unless the muscular system is duly exercised; hence the welfare of the lungs, alimentary organs, secretory and excretory functions, and through them every part of the body, depends directly upon this. The neglect will inevitably entail upon the transgressor all the evils of deficient respiration.

imperfect digestion, nutrition, secretion, excretion, sluggish circulation, and torpid mental action. Need we say that no one in this condition, or under these circumstances, can long remain in health or enjoy happiness? Necessary effects soon follow their causes. But I need not enumerate more of the evils which follow deficiency of muscular exercise; they will be readily acknowledged by one and all. There is, at least a theoretical consent on all hands to the proposition that want of exercise is what it exists, the cause of great evil, and that regular and sufficient muscular action is one of the most efficient promoters of health, and through it of happiness. And among the laboring classes, the blessing of poverty, renders it necessary that theory should be combined with practice.

Here, there is not usually a deficiency, but frequently an excess of muscular action. Excessive labor, so far from being a good, is an evil, and one of great magnitude.

Although every organ should be regularly, and sufficiently exercised, in accordance with the organic laws, and must be in order to preserve it in health, yet the excessive use of the same organ is always injurious; it must therefore be varied. Or in other words, every organ of the body should have its proper physical education.

But among those who are not under the necessity of daily labor, although they generally admit the necessity of exercise, it is, as we have before said, almost universally neglected. They need to feel more strongly its paramount importance and absolute necessity.

They need to realize that health and happiness cannot possibly be enjoyed without it. That most or all the ailments under which they are suffering, are either caused, aggravated and perpetuated by habitual inaction of the muscles; and that muscular exercise of right kind, and in sufficient quantity, is so very efficacious in promoting bodily health and vigor, that it will fortify the system against injurious influences which would otherwise destroy it, and even enable it to resist and bear up under a course of physiological transgression, for many years, in comparative health and vigor, which would otherwise have soon crushed it to the earth. One great reason why laboring people as a general thing, are much more healthy and vigorous than the

sedantary,— and are enabled to resist for so long a time the pernicious influence of their dietetic and other transgressions, is because of their habitual and vigorous use of their muscular system. This so happily promotes and strengthens all the functions of the body, as we have seen, that it fortifies them against the effects of injurious influences, and enables them to bear up for a long time under a weight of physical sin, which would almost instantly crush a sedantary or indolent man. Not that labor can render bad physical influences absolutely harmless, but it will mitigate their effects, and postpone their inevitable consequences to a later period. For instance, a body debilitated by want of muscular exercise, would have little power of resisting miasma or

infection; whereas one invigorated by manly labor, would not be so liable to be made sick by the same means. So of other injurious influences. But we cannot pursue our theme and can only allude in these few pages, to this great defect in our education, with all its attendant evils; so disastrous to health and life, which the physician has ever to encounter.

For there is no hygienic agent of more consequence, none which needs such incessant urging by the medical attendant, upon patients invalided through indolence, and no curative agent more thoroughly, systematically neglected than physical exertion. But we have much to hope, for the good of humanity, from the triumphant advancement of the only known law of cure: similia similibus curantur: No believer in this doctrine, can be

insensible to the importance of attending to the minutiae of matters modifying health and involving life. — And finally; we believe that to be the wisest and best regimen, which takes the infant from the cradle, and conducts him along childhood and youth, up to high maturity, in such a manner as to give strength to his arms, swiftness to his feet, solidity and amplitude to his muscles, symmetry to his frame, and expansion to his vital energies. It is obvious, that this branch of education comprehends not only food and clothing, but air, exercise, lodging, early rising, and whatever else is requisite, to the full development of the physical constitution.

The diet must be simple, the apparel must not be too warm, nor the bed too soft.

Let parents beware of too much restriction

in the management of their darling boy.
Let him in choosing his play, follow
the suggestions of nature. If they would
make him hardy and fearless, they must
let him roam abroad as often as he pleases
in his early boyhood and amuse himself
by the hour together, in gathering flowers beneath
the summer's sun, — or in smoothing and whistling
the hoary locks of winter. Instead of keeping him
shut up all day with a stove, and graduating
his sleeping room by Fahrenheit, they must let
him face the keen edge of a north wind, when
the mercury is below cipher; and instead of mind-
ing a little shivering and complaining, when he
returns, cheer up his spirits, and send him out
again. In this way, they will teach him, that
he was not born to live in a nursery, nor to
brood over the fire; but to range abroad, as free

as the air, and to gain warmth from exercise.

We can but love and admire the youth, who turns not back from the howling blast, nor withers under the blaze of summer; who never magnifies mole hills into mountains; but whose daring eye, & bold bearing, scales the eagle's airy crag, and who is ready to undertake anything that is prudent, and lawful, within the range of possibility. — And such alone are fitted to ascend the "Hill of Science," & to write their names high upon the "Scroll of Fame."

Who would think of planting the mountain oak — in a greenhouse? or rearing the cedar of Lebanon in a lady's flower-pot?

Who does not know that, in order to attain their mighty strength, and majestic form, they must freely enjoy the rain, and the sunshine, and must feel the rocking of the tempest?